

Stories of

TENALI RAMAKRISHNA



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TENALI RAMAKRISHNA STORIES

Exercises at the end

by: Anand



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1. RAMAKRISHNA OF TENALI



To understand the fame and genius of Tenali Ramakrishna, we should know the history of Vijayanagar Kingdom and the political situation of India. Most of the kingdoms were quite small and ruled by dictators some of whom were good and some others tyrants. They enjoyed supreme powers under the principle that the king is a visible god and does no mistakes. Democracy was not practised as we know it today. The fate of the people of a kingdom depended on the state of mind of their king.

Ramakrishna lived when the Vijayanagar kingdom was passing through its most glorious period. It was not only the pride of Karnataka but was

also one of the most powerful and enlightened empires of the world. Visitors from other parts of India and abroad have written volumes in its praise. Founded with the blessings of the great sage Vidyardanya, Vijayanagar Kingdom in Karnataka had a succession of illustrious rulers, the most famous of them being Shree Krishnadevaraya. He was powerful, wise and generous and patronized arts, culture and literature.

He had eight wise ministers in his court who were known as 'Ashta Diggajas' after the legendary elephant that is supposed to support the earth with its eight heads in the eight directions. The eight wise ministers were selected personally by Shri Krishnadevaraya based purely on their merits in their respective fields. These ministers had their own individual and independent functions and were required to advise the king.

Tenali Ramakrishna was one of them and was liked by the king for his cleverness. He was also popular as a great jester. He was said to be blessed by Goddess Kalika Devi to be one of the greatest jesters, better known as vikata kavis. A vikata kavi is a poet who composes poetry in a humorous and odd form unlike a professional jester.

The story of how he was blessed by Kalikamba goes like this:

Tenali was a small village where Ramakrishna was born. Even as a boy, he was a great devotee of Goddess Kalika Devi and used to worship Her daily at Her temple in the village. One afternoon he was meditating in Her temple as usual after taking bath in the nearby pond. A sage passing there by that time was impressed by his devotion and asked him, "Oh, child, do you come to the temple every day?" Ramakrishna replied, "Yes, Swamiji."

“Do you venerate Kalika Devi so much?”

“Yes, Swamiji, She is looking after me well.”

“Have you seen Her?”

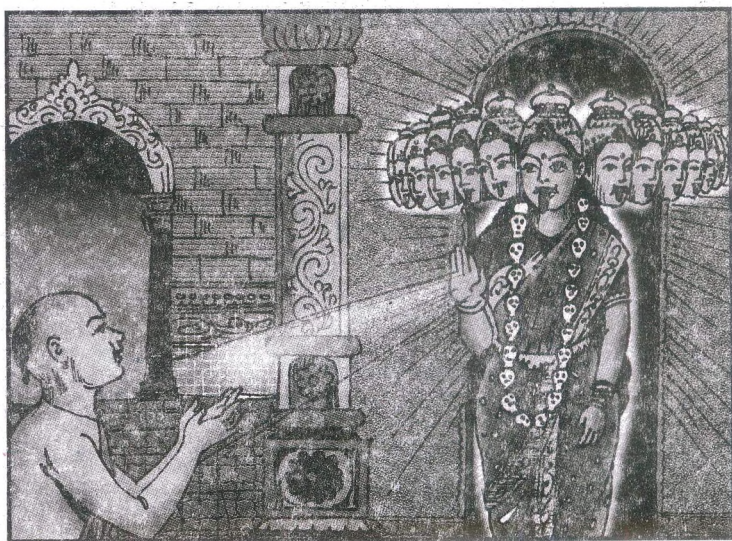
“No, Swamiji, She hasn’t given Her Darshan to me. But will She? I am so eager to have Her Darshan.”

“Yes, my dear child. Are you not her great devotee? I advise you to pray to Her with full concentration for the whole of the night. She will appear before you, but you should not be afraid looking at Her for you may see Her thousands of faces and arms.”

“Not at all, Swamiji, why should I fear her? I worship Her every day.”

“Well then, child, I shall guide you how to pray to Her and chant Her Manthras (effective divine prayers). She will grant your wishes and you will become famous and rich.”

The sage guided Ramakrishna and left. On his part, Ramakrishna prayed sincerely; he did not even feel the rising of sun the next morning. He was still immersed in his prayers when he heard a melodious voice calling "Ramakrishna." When he opened his eyes, he was bewildered by the terrific form of Goddess Kali. As the sage had said, he was looking at many, many faces with shining red eyes that seemed to be angry. Any other mortal would



have fainted in fear. But, Ramakrishna, instead, began to laugh merrily and loudly.

“Ramakrishna, why are you laughing at me? Are you not terrified?” Goddess Kali questioned.

“Oh, Mother, why should I be?” replied Ramakrishna, “I’m Your staunch devotee.”

“But, then, why did you laugh at me?” Goddess pretended to be angry.

“Oh, Mother of All Universe, please pardon me.” Ramakrishna was about to weep but got courage to say “I laughed because a sudden doubt arose in my mind noticing your only two hands as against countless faces.”

“What of that?” Goddess questioned further.

“Oh, Almighty Mother,” explained Ramakrishna with all humility, “we have only one nose and two hands, yet,

when we get cold and our noses begin to run, we just cannot manage that single nose with both the hands. So, I was simply visualising how You would be struggling to wipe hundreds of noses barely with two hands. I couldn't control my laughter, Mother, I beg You: Please pardon me and don't curse me."

The Merciful Mother was dumbfound at the natural innocence, observation and inference of the village boy. She was impressed very well and She too laughed at his abnormal but vivid imagination.

"Ramakrishna," Kalikamba told him, "You are, no doubt, innocent and inquisitive, but you are also mischievous. I, therefore, intend to make you a vikatakavi. Go to Vijayanagar kingdom and meet the king Krishnadevaraya. You will become famous throughout the world as a great court jester and a resourceful man." So blessing, She disappeared.

Ramakrishna was very happy indeed and bowed to the Goddess and the sage in his mind. He decided to embark on the long journey to Vijayanagar in search of his destiny.

2. KRISHNA TESTS RAMAKRISHNA !



Though blessed by the Goddess, admission to the court of Vijayanagar was not a path of roses for Ramakrishna! Let alone the king, not even an acquaintance

was at the palace gates to receive him or talk to him. He was just an unknown boy from a remote, undeveloped village, who couldn't even imagine the grandeur of the most flourishing kingdom in the world at that time. Visitors from other

parts of India and abroad were awestruck at the vigour and wisdom of the king and the splendour of the kingdom. But Ramakrishna was no ordinary mortal; he was a boy with inborn wit and blessed by none other than Kalikamba Herself.

At first, as expected, he was refused entry at the gate by the guards for he had no permit. At the same time, he saw a troupe of artistes going through the gate; immediately, he thought of a trick. He dressed himself like a shepherd and went to the guard and lied, "I am a member of the artistes' troupe that went in just now, I was delayed because the shepherd's dress was not available, so, please allow me in as it is already late."

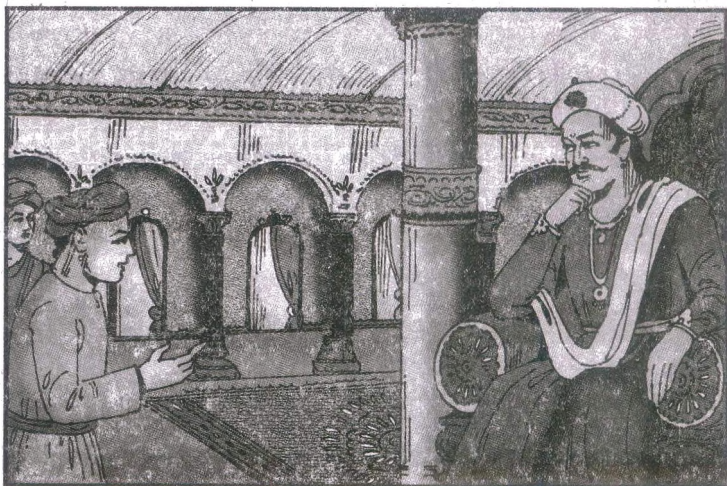
The guard was not convinced and did not allow him in. Ramakrishna was not disappointed but immediately came out with an idea.

“Sir,” persisted Ramakrishna, “please let me in. You know that the king is a great lover of arts and gives generous gifts to us. I promise to give you half of whatever he gives to me.”

The greedy guard fell for the idea.

Once inside the palace, Ramakrishna was lost. He lost track of the artistes and began roaming aimlessly. Wandering here and there, he stepped right on to the stage where the troupe that preceded him was performing. Looking at the unexpected entrance of a confused shepherd in the midst of the show, the audience began to laugh but the king got wild at the intrusion. Immediately the guards there brought Ramakrishna before the king.

Krishnadevaraya asked him who he was and how come he appeared on the stage from nowhere, disrupting the performance.



Ramakrishna was not perturbed in the least. After all, he had seen the Goddess and been blessed by Her! He was cool as cucumber in replying, “Your Highness, I am Ramakrishna of Tenali. Kalikamba instructed me to meet Your Highness. She told me that you will make me your Court Jester.”

Krishnadevaraya, who was already angry because of his interruption became wild as he felt this fearless reply was rather impudence of Ramakrishna. He decided to punish him and ordered

the guards to lash him 50 times. Ramakrishna was taken aback but didn't lose his mind. He had prepared himself for this and told the king, "Your Highness, I am happy to receive whatever you give me but I have a partner to share your gift."

The king looked at him in surprise.

Ramakrishna explained to the king how he was stopped by the guard from seeing him and how he was forced to make a false promise to the guard that he would share with him half of whatever gifts he got from the king in order to gain entry into the palace.

Krishnadevaraya was a wise king. He noticed that Ramakrishna was a boy but too intelligent for his age. He wanted to confirm his intelligence before taking any decision. He put him to a test without actually mentioning it. Pretending to be still angry, he rebuked "Ramakrishna, both giving and

taking bribes are punishable according to law. Therefore, I hereby order that your head be cut off tomorrow morning.” The king wanted to know how he would escape. The courtiers could not understand the king’s intentions and felt sorry for the boy.

The honest guards who took Ramakrishna in the morning to behead him also felt that the punishment was too severe. Hence when he told them that it was their custom to take bath and do pooja (worship) in the morning, the guards could not refuse his request. Moreover, they gave him plenty of fruits and food after pooja to eat his last meal. In fact, they took a lot of pity on him. Ramakrishna became tired after doing pooja and eating plenty of rich food and went to sleep. The guards did not know what they had to do when the boy was fast asleep. It was against one’s culture to kill a man, and a boy in this case, when he was sleeping.

They waited till Ramakrishna woke up. But Ramakrishna, sensing their feelings, told them "Guards, you are all my elders but you have a duty to obey the king. I know your conscience bothers you in killing me. If you don't mind, I have a plan whereby you will do your duty and I will escape death. The king would not punish you for you did obey him."

The guards were quick to tell him "Ramakrishna, you are like our own son. We cannot make up our minds to behead you. If you have such a plan that will free you from death without ourselves disobeying the king's orders, be sure we will accept it."

"Oh, my elders," went on, Ramakrishna, "I don't intend to mislead you. Please do as I say. I shall stand in the neck-deep waters of the Thungabhadra river and close my eyes. When I chant the name of "Shree Ram",

you swing your swords to chop off my head.”

The guards could neither understand his intention nor disagree with him. They forced their minds and prepared themselves for the final act fearing that that was the end of Ramakrishna. They drew their swords up and kept them ready in their hands and were waiting for Ramakrishna to utter “Shree Ram”.

Ramakrishna was too smart for them; no sooner he chanted “Shree Ram” than he ducked his head under water before the guards swung their swords. The swords were swift but not fast enough to cut off Ramakrishna’s head. He dived deep and swam far off, came above the water and called the guards who were wondering what had happened to him. He told them “You did your duty, you drew your swords on me but as luck would have it, I escaped and

you cannot draw your swords the second time as it is against conventions. Now take me to the king and we will explain to him.”

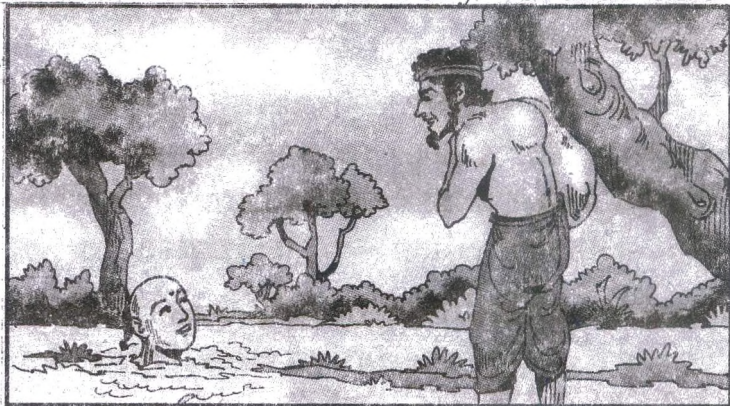
The king heard calmly and began to think that Goddess Kalikamba might have blessed him but was not yet willing to admit it. He put Ramakrishna to another test. He admonished the guards for their inefficiency and ordered them “Be careful now, I don’t want him to escape again. Bury him in a neck-deep trench this time in the ground so that he cannot duck or dive. Let an elephant trample his head. Now off to your duty, quick.”

Ramakrishna was literally in a tight situation, being unable to move in the pit this way or that. He could only see what was happening and oscillate his head. The guards had left him to his fate and gone to fetch an elephant to

march it over his head. Ramakrishna began praying to Goddess Kalikamba.

His escape came to him in the form of a launderer! The pit was on the route of the palace launderer. On his way, the launderer saw this pitiable boy in a pit and out of curiosity asked him the reason for his condition. Ramakrishna observed this man like a hunter. The launderer was hunch-backed, possibly due to carrying heavy bundles of palace clothes on his back every day. That was enough for Ramakrishna!

“Oh, my friend Launderer,” began Ramakrishna in a very cordial and



concerned tone, "I would say it is your sheer good luck that brought you here." and kept quiet.

The launderer's curiosity increased and begged him to tell about his good luck.

Ramakrishna pretended he was going to tell only to help him. "You see, friend," he continued, "I had a back more hunched than yours because I had to lift much heavier goods. I requested a great doctor to cure it some how. He suggested a secret medicine." And Ramakrishna stopped as if he was not sure whether to divulge the secret to him or not.

The launderer became impatient and all the more curious as he had a hunch back and begged him to disclose the secret medicine to him also.

Ramakrishna continued as if he was doing a great favour and called him near

so that no others could hear what he was going to tell. "Friend, the doctor advised I should dig a deep trench and stand in it for a few hours. Owing to the pressure of earth all around me my back would be straightened. True to what he said, I am already feeling erect. I now request you to take me out and see for yourself."

The launderer lifted him up hurriedly to examine him and his joy knew no bounds when he saw the erect Ramakrishna. He begged Ramakrishna to ease him into the pit and cover him with all the loose mud tightly around him so he too could come out with a straight back after a few hours. And Ramakrishna was only too eager to help him and also offered to carry the load of clothes to the palace on his behalf!

So was Ramakrishna standing again before the king with the load of palace linen! Krishnadevaraya couldn't

control his laughter. He was convinced that he had the blessings of Kalikamba. He told Ramakrishna, "I am now convinced that you are a resourceful boy. Even though you are very young, you deserve to be my minister. Come tomorrow properly dressed as a minister."

Ramakrishna was overwhelmed and thought it was too high an honour for him and hesitatingly told the king, "Oh king, I am so happy you are pleased with me. But I am only a jester and may not rise up to your expectation as your minister. I think I should remain just a jester."

The king became angry and shouted "How dare you question my selection? Get lost and don't show your face to me." But the king was really pleased with Ramakrishna's humility.

The royal court assembled the next day as usual and was in the middle of



its proceedings when a strange character appeared in the court hall. The person was in *darbar* dress but his head was covered in an earthen pot. The pot had two holes through which two eyes were peering. Some courtiers began to laugh and some others began to gaze in wonder. When the king questioned him the strange man replied, "Oh, Maharaja, I am your obedient servant Ramakrishna of Tenali. Yesterday, you ordered that I shouldn't show my face to you. So I devised this earthen pot and covered my face in order to attend the court."

The king learnt Ramakrishna was not merely witty but also a very intelligent boy. "Ramakrishna, from now on, you will be both a minister as per my wish and a jester as per your wish. So that will solve the whole problem." So saying, he hugged Ramakrishna and gave him a good present.

3. SUBBASHASTHRI LEARNS THE HARD WAY!



There are countless stories, examples and anecdotes attributed to Tenali Ramakrishna as in the case of Birbal in Akbar's court. Many of them may be true and a few just ascribed to him to gain popularity. There are no written records to verify them. But what is

really important for all of us is that there is a lesson for all of us in each and every instance whatever be our profession.

We will start with Subbashasthri who learnt the lesson of his life from Ramakrishna.

There are always people who are jealous by nature, who cannot tolerate others coming up in life owing to their merit. Such sinners, not being happy themselves, will use all their means to demean other talented people. Subbashasthri was the palace purohith (a person who performs religious functions on behalf of his followers) who was proud of his intelligence and knowledge. He could not accept the fact that there could be other intelligent people on earth besides himself. He wouldn't miss a single occasion to contradict or disparage Ramakrishna. This torture went on for quite some time

until Ramakrishna thought it was time to teach that purohith a good lesson.

One day, a merchant from Persia brought splendid horses to the court for sale. Krishnadevaraya liked the horses and bought them. When he was handing over the horses to his cavalry for training, Ramakrishna intervened and requested the king to give him also a horse because he also wanted to train it. The king was surprised and thought he was up to some thing. All the same, he gave Ramakrishna a good horse with a warning that he should look after the horse very well and also gave him money for expenses.

Many days passed and the king wanted to see those horses. Horses given to cavalry were full of life and active. The king was pleased. But he remembered that he had given one to Ramakrishna also and asked him to bring it to the field. Ramakrishna was

waiting for this occasion and told the king "Maharaja, this horse is very stubborn and does not listen to me. I know some thing about horses but this is beyond me. I am sure not even a cavalry man can bring it here. I recommend Shree Subbashasthri who is regarded as an authority on horses to go with me to my horse stable and personally bring it here."

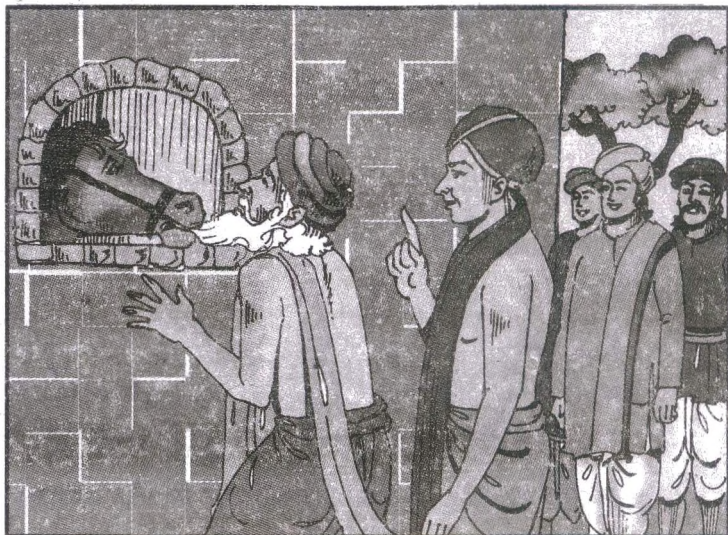
The proud Subbashasthri was elated, the flattery coming from Ramakrishna himself. But he did not forget to show off or taunt him. "Ramakrishna," he commenced in style, "Ashwa Vidya is not every body's cup. It is one of the great sixty four arts and requires enormous intellect to learn it. I was actually wondering how an ordinary jester could handle a horse and because I want you to realize my greatness I agree to come to your horse and help you. Now proceed with me."

Ramakrishna appeared quite humble and meek and with the king's permission, took Subbashasthri to his horse stable.

Ramakrishna's plan was ingenious and perfect. He had built the stable in such a way that it had only one hole in one of its walls and a canal. The hole was used to feed the horse and the canal for the horse to drink water. Only one bundle of hay was fed through the hole once a day; as a result, the horse had become thin and ravenous and accustomed to feeding through the hole.

Ramakrishna brought Subbashasthri near the stable and asked "Shasthriji, shall I open the stable for you?"

Shasthriji retorted "Now, Ramakrishna, better you keep to yourself. I know about horses much better than a vikatakavi like you. I shall first see



it through this hole to assess it in my own way.”

That was exactly what Ramakrishna wanted and had been waiting for. Subbashasthri had grown a long, grey and ample beard and was quite proud of it. He had dressed it with care and given a good and pointed form. And when he peeped into the hole to gain a good look at the horse, the famished horse jumped at once at what it thought was its usual bundle of hay

and gripped it tightly between its teeth and started chewing. It never loosened its grip for fear of losing its food! Subbashasthri started shouting and crying in pain.

Losing no time, Ramakrishna called for help and took Subbashasthri with his beard in the horse's mouth to the field where the king was waiting for them. Subbashasthri was weeping loudly in pain because the hungry horse was dragging him with no intention of losing its food. The cavalry men rescued him immediately. The king wanted to fire Ramakrishna suspecting it was Ramakrishna's mischief and also for starving the horse. When he started to scold Ramakrishna, Subbashasthri intervened, "Oh, Maharaja, please don't scold him. It is entirely my fault. My pride is humiliated. I tested Ramakrishna's patience all these days and for all that I learnt in a hard way

the lesson of my life. In future I will not belittle anybody and give due respect to everybody, however, high or low."

Ramakrishna also requested Subbashasthri to pardon him and be friends with him. Listening at all this and knowing Ramakrishna fully well, Shree Krishnadevaraya pardoned both and advised that jealousy is to be treated as one's enemy.

4. "THILAKAASHTA MAHISHA BANDHANA"



What you cannot achieve by strength, you have to achieve it by a good plan. A great scholar came to the king's court one day. He showed all his certificates and

testimonials he had earned from far and wide. He knew all the four Vedas, namely Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvanaveda, Vedanga, Upanishads and so on. But he had a drawback—he always wanted to show off. He liked flattery and had a group of followers whose duty was to praise him for whatever he said or did. He wanted to prove that there was nothing on earth that he did not know of. He used to challenge people to a debate and disgrace them.

And when he threw an open challenge in the court of Shree Krishnadevaraya, the king looked at his scholars and immediately grasped that no one was ready to accept the challenge. But he did not give any indication of his despair. He fixed a date himself for the debate and told the visiting scholar to come prepared on that date for the debate. After the visitor left, the king expressed his great

disappointment with the scholars of his court and warned them of his displeasure.

The court scholars assembled and consulted among themselves. They felt they were no match for the visitor and were afraid to face him. Finally they all agreed that there was only one man who could save their prestige as well as that of the court. That man was none other than Ramakrishna, the vikatakavi! They all went in a procession to his house explained to him what happened in the court and begged him to save them from disgrace. Ramakrishna thought for a while and told "My dear friends, it is a question of the prestige of all of us and it is my duty to bring honour to our court. You leave it to me, I will solve the problem." The court scholars felt relieved and went back.

The day of the debate arrived. All were anxious and worried. The king

himself was not happy. The visiting scholar came to the dais with overconfidence and sat on the chair provided to him. His followers also were there to cheer him. These debates were not new to the visitor for he had won all of them. He sat there expecting his next loser whom he could disgrace.



A few minutes passed; by then the court scholars had become nervous and the king was wondering. Just then came a stranger well dressed like a traditional pundith carrying a heavy package. He bowed to the king and went

to dais and occupied his seat. He kept the packet on the table and uncovered the wrapper. It appeared to be a big volume tied neatly by thick strings. He wished the visitor. The king as well as the court scholars could not recognize the stranger. However, the king, hoping for the best, announced "Let the debate begin."

There was silence in the court. The stranger started the conversation "Great scholar, I have heard much about you. They all say that you have read all the great classics and there is nothing that you are not aware of." The visiting scholar assumed humility but declared that was true and challenged him as to any treatise. "Then," the stranger said, "Sir, I have brought here with me a small but well-regarded classic called 'Thilakaashta Mahisha Bandhana' which I am sure you also must have mastered. As it is my

favourite subject, I thought I could impress you with my knowledge. I hope you would not object to my request.”

The visiting scholar thought for a moment, tried to remember the said title but could not recollect having read such a volume. He was nonplussed. He could say neither ‘yes’ nor ‘no’ to his opponent. If he said ‘yes’, he had to talk about it; if he said ‘no’, he would be humiliated. Finally, he said “Scholar, it is long back, in my younger days that I remember to have read that book. Hence I think I cannot discuss it right now, but if you could give me a day’s time, I would be able to refresh my memory and debate any point over that subject.”

The stranger said he had no objection whatsoever. Both the scholars looked at the king for a decision. The king who had recovered by then, gave his consent willingly.

The next morning dawned and the court was ready to witness the debate. And it was the stranger who arrived first and sat at his place with his heavy packet. All the audience including the king waited for the visiting scholar. There was no sign of the visitor or his chelas (followers). A long time passed, yet the visiting party was not to be seen. The king ordered his guards to search for him. The guards returned with the news that his premises were vacant and not even his belongings were seen there.

The king and others concluded the visiting scholar had run away to avoid dishonour to himself in the court. The king declared that the stranger had won a knock-out! But he became inquisitive and asked the stranger who he was after thanking him profusely for saving the good name of the court.

The stranger removed his disguise and stunned the king and others for he

was the same court jester Ramakrishna! The king asked him how he could succeed while other great scholars dreaded even to try and what that great book was. Ramakrishna explained patiently "Oh King, there is nothing great in what I did. I simply confused him with this packet. It contains some old and useless books above which I placed gingelly sticks (Thila Kaashta) and tied them with a string (Bandhana) which is used to tie buffaloes (Mahisha). Overall, I gave the name to the packet 'Thila Kaashta Mahisha Bandhana.' The poor visitor got himself confused and deceived for he thought he would exhibit his ignorance if he refused having read it. And he had no confidence to deny that such a book existed at all looking at my disguise of an old and learned pandith. I hope Your Highness will pardon me for I did this with good intentions."

The court scholars sighed in relief and were all praise for Ramakrishna for keeping up his word. But they were in for the king's wrath. He scolded them in no uncertain terms for not raising their levels of knowledge in spite of all the encouragement he gave to them and for seeking the help of Ramakrishna.

5. THE GREEDY BRAHMINS



A Brahmin is a man who knows Brahma, lives in peace with himself and with all others. He is bound by duty to enlighten others so that all the others also live in harmony, praying to the Master of the Universe, doing what is expected of them by the society in

which they live. He does not expect any returns or rewards for his services but accepts whatever others give him irrespective of their status. He does not grade the donors according to what they give him but treats all people equally. His is truly a 'simple living and high thinking'.

But life became more complicated and competitive and people including Brahmins became degenerated and avaricious. Wrong advices were given and unfounded fears about the unknown were raised in people's minds to grab more returns for their services. But Ramakrishna was a true Brahmin who wanted to serve the society. He could not tolerate the greed of some Brahmins who misled people. He was waiting for the right opportunity to teach such Brahmins righteousness and their duties.

Krishnadevaraya's mother was on

death bed. She believed in charity to Brahmins. Her last wish was to donate mangoes to them. But unfortunately, it was not mango season and by the time the king's men could search here and there and procure the mangoes, his mother drew her last breath. The king felt very sad and repentant that he could not fulfil his mother's last wish. He consulted his purohith how he could atone for his 'sin'.

The purohith was a greedy man and saw a good opportunity to make some money for himself and for other Brahmins. He told the king "Do not worry, Oh king, there is a way out for this lapse on your part. You could not fulfill your mother's last wish of giving away live mangoes to Brahmins. As an alternative, to set right this failure, you have to donate golden mangoes to them on the day of her death ceremony."

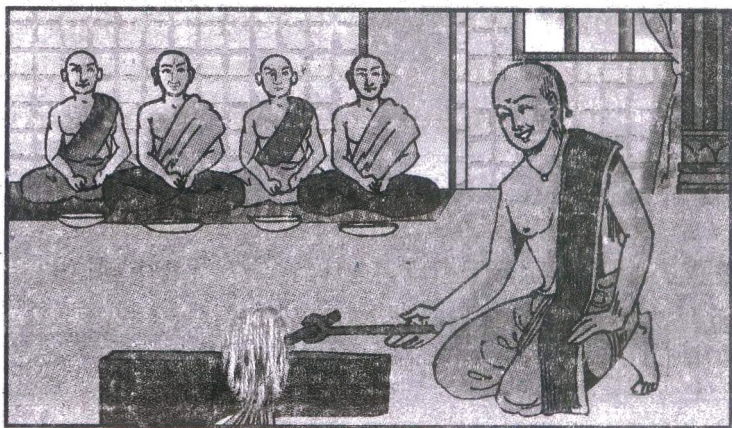
Krishnadevaraya was a religious

man and believed in good faith whatever the Brahmins advised him. He spent plenty of money making golden mangoes and on the day of his mother's death ceremony, distributed them to the Brahmins along with usual charities. The Brahmins who received the golden mangoes praised the king to no extent and assured him that his mother pardoned him, the gods pardoned him and appreciated his devotion to his mother and there was no doubt that his mother would go to heaven. Blessing to their hearts' content, they all readied themselves to go home.

Ramakrishna had heard of this and had made his own plan to use the same opportunity. Before the Brahmins could return to their houses with the golden mangoes and other gifts he approached them and requested them "Oh, learned Brahmins, I am very sorry to disturb

you at this time but coincidentally my mother's death ceremony also is today; I have already made arrangements and I beg of you to come to my house also and perform the rites and receive the gifts."

The Brahmins knew that Ramakrishna had received plenty of gifts from the Maharaja. They felt they were lucky as they could grab some more presents and Dakshine (usually money or some thing in kind given to religious people like Brahmins, monks, etc. after they perform certain religious



functions). Hence they all went to his house also with great expectations.

To their dismay, they did not see any of the usual preparations going on in his house. Making them seated in the house, Ramakrishna locked the house from inside and went straight to the hearth in his kitchen with a few iron rods and began to heat them in the fire. The Brahmins became uneasy and disturbed. In unison, they all shouted "Ramakrishna, what are you doing? What is this thamasha (fun)? What did you tell us and what are you doing? What are the arrangements for the ceremony? We have become hungry waiting here since a long time. We can't wait any longer." They went on shouting.

Ramakrishna heard all the shouting patiently, requested them to cool down and announced, "My dear learned Brahmins, Please be calm. I am only

trying to fulfill my mother's last wish for I too failed in obeying her. It will take only a little time more for the iron rods to become red hot. And then I will not waste a minute in commencing my work."

His reply puzzled the Brahmins all the more and a few became a little nervous also for none could comprehend Ramakrishna's inner thoughts. They shouted again "Ramakrishna, this is ridiculous. What has the death ceremony to do with the iron rods? You are wasting everybody's time. We are thinking of returning home."

Ramakrishna began in a sober and convincing tone "You see, my mother was suffering from arthritis and her doctor had advised her to keep red hot iron rods on her body to get rid of the joint pains. But unfortunately, before I could heat them to red hot temperature, she expired. I know her soul is

wandering here in agony. Therefore I decided to heat the iron rods fully hot and then keep them on your bodies. Please excuse me for the delay. But I see now that the rods are glowing red hot and request all of you to lie on the carpet in line so that I shall keep those red hot iron rods on your bodies for about ten minutes.”

The Brahmins were aghast hearing his words and got so much afraid that they could not speak. A few of them became bold and questioned Ramakrishna's logic. Ramakrishna was waiting for this opportunity and told them “You think that you are learned and can hoodwink people. Pray, tell me, if the king has to atone for his sin, he has to donate golden mangoes to you and you have to receive them very happily; then is it not logical with the same yardstick that you have to receive equally happily the red hot iron rods

on your bodies to enable me atone for my sin also?"

The Brahmins understood at once Ramakrishna's intentions and returned the golden mangoes to him and requested him to spare them the hot rods.

Krishnadevaraya got the news that Ramakrishna took the golden mangoes from the Brahmins. He called for a meeting immediately summoning Ramakrishna to explain his conduct. But the Brahmins ashamed of their greediness and of misleading the ignorant people confessed in the open meeting. They agreed to be true to their teachings and thanked Ramakrishna for making them repent their sins.

But the king was apprehensive. He told "But it is against our law, culture and Dharma to take back the charity that is already given. What are you going to do, Ramakrishna?"

“Oh, Your Majesty,” said Ramakrishna, “I have already done what I had to do. Please rest assured for I have returned all the golden mangoes to the Brahmins’ houses. I am not an exception and I practise what I preach.”

6. YOU LOVE YOUR MOTHER TONGUE THE MOST !



A linguist came to Krishna-devaraya's court one day and told him he knew many languages and offered himself for a test in the court. The courtiers spoke to him in as many languages as were known to them. The linguist replied to the courtiers in the same languages respectively and more

fluently than the questioners themselves. The king and the courtiers were impressed. At the same moment, the linguist challenged the court to discern his mother tongue. If they failed, the king had to give him whatever he asked.

The challenge was accepted and the courtiers tried their intelligence in finding out his mother tongue but in vain. Ramakrishna, too, declared that the visitor was really a great linguist well-versed in many languages but he could make out his mother tongue in a day's time. He agreed to wait for a day. The king arranged for comfortable stay of the guest.

The visitor was very happy with the hospitality of the king. He had a sumptuous dinner with several courses and good drinks. After some time, he felt sleepy and went to bed in his room. After good food and drinks and a



successful day at the court, he was sleeping like a child without any worries. But Ramakrishna had a challenge to meet and was very active. He was waiting for the linguist to sleep deeply.

There was total darkness in the room but Ramakrishna was well aware of the objects and surroundings. He made a sudden loud noise and at the same time tickled his body with a soft brush. The linguist woke up with a sudden convulsion in the dark night and

blurted out "Evudura Adi?" ("who is it"). And that was his mother tongue! Ramakrishna went out as silently as he had come in without being noticed by the guest. The guest called for the guards and getting assured by them that there was nothing wrong, went back to his slumber without further disturbance or knowing he had leaked out his mother tongue in fear!

The court was waiting for Ramakrishna the next day with all impatience. The linguist was overconfident and was thinking of what he should ask the king as a gift. Ramakrishna, came as usual with a big smile on his face, bowed to the king and sat in his place. The king asked him "Yes, Ramakrishna, all are waiting for your answer, speak out."

Ramakrishna spoke all the languages that the linguist had conversed in on the day before and told

“We regard all languages equal. We do not discriminate one against an other. But due to historical or other reasons, we may have to prefer a single language at certain times. But whatever be the reason, it is inborn human nature to love one’s mother tongue the most. A mother tongue is the dearest to any of us. However proficient we may be in any one or more languages, we think in our mother tongues and in all natural circumstances, whether pleasant or unpleasant, we speak out first in our mother tongues. Based on this fact, I devised a simple trick. When I woke up our talented pandith at once last night, he, without any effort resorted to his mother tongue. And Your Majesty, that language is Telugu. I, now, request the linguist to confirm it or deny it.”

The visiting linguist was sincere in his admiration. He told frankly “So far in my visits to countless courts of kings,

no body was smart enough to find out my mother tongue. My hats off, to Ramakrishna. I declare he is one of the most intelligent people I have come across in my life and I agree with him entirely.”

7. DIGNITY OF ONE'S PROFESSION



Different people acquire proficiency in different professions. And whoever achieves success in his profession gets due respect from people. But there are some people who always envy others believing that they are happier than themselves. Such people become a nuisance in society. This is the story of one such man who was educated by Ramakrishna.

Krishnadevaraya had a barber who

was devoted to his work. He was an expert hair dresser who was an authority on hair styles. He had regarded it his duty to keep the king's hair style trim. Hence the king was very fond of him and used to treat him very well. But he was not satisfied comparing himself to Ramakrishna. He wanted to become a jester and a minister like Ramakrishna and get the attention of people. A few courtiers who hated Ramakrishna supported the barber and suggested that he request the king to make him the court jester in Ramakrishna's place.

Krishnadevaraya realized that his barber was nourishing impossible dreams and some of his so-called friends were behind this conspiracy to hurt Ramakrishna. He did not know how to solve this problem and thought it better to leave its solution to Ramakrishna himself. So, he told the barber to come

to the court and take Ramakrishna's place from the next day.

The barber and his well-wishers were elated. He came early and occupied Ramakrishna's seat. Ramakrishna came at his usual time and was surprised to see the barber sitting in his place but understood immediately what might have happened. He looked at the king who nodded his head. He wished the new occupant and took another place in the court. The court proceedings began and within a short span of time, the barber began to feel like a fish out of water. He could not comprehend what was going on in the court and hence could not give suitable replies and became a laughing stock. Even a few courtiers who supported him could not render any help to him. He started annoying the king, the courtiers and the visiting dignitaries. He felt uneasy and took leave of the king.

He came out of the court and was on his way home. On the way he saw Ramakrishna washing a dog at a public tap. He got curious and asked him "My Lord, what is this you are doing. You are a minister and you are washing a dog here at the road side. What has happened to you?" Ramakrishna replied "Friend, you can see this dog is black in colour. I don't like its colour. I want it to be white. Therefore, I am washing it with soap and water to change its colour to white." The barber began to laugh and said "My Lord, you are certainly



joking, can a black dog become white by washing it with water?"

Ramakrishna retorted "If a barber can hope to become a minister just by sitting in the chair of a minister without proper education, training and experience, can a black dog not change its colour by washing itself a few times with water and soap?" The barber who had felt humiliated in the court was quick to grasp Ramakrishna's advice. He fell at his feet and begged him to pardon him. Ramakrishna advised him further "You are a great barber and have become famous in your trade. When people want attractive hair styles, they think of you and not of Ramakrishna. When people think of stitching good clothes, they think of a very good tailor and not of you or of me. You have chosen a profession and have achieved success. Be happy and do not waver your mind looking at others."

The barber was a matured man and realized his folly. He went to the king and confessed "Your Majesty, I am happy as your barber. Ramakrishna taught me what is necessary to lead a contented life. Please take back the position of ministership you conferred on me today and retain me as your earlier barber."

The king knew things would move this way, smiled at him and set things right.

8. A CLEVER REPLY



Once Krishnadevaraya got a religious doubt in his mind. He questioned the court "In the caste system of Hindus, the three Varnas (castes), that is, the Shudras, the Vyshyas and the Kshathriyas respect

and revere the Brahmins. My question is: Whom do the Brahmins revere?"

All the Brahmin courtiers said unanimously "The cow." Ramakrishna added, "Even the gods revere the cow for its noble qualities and nearness to the supreme gods."

"Then," the king asked, "why do the Brahmins wear shoes made out of cowhide?"

Perhaps the rest of the Brahmin courtiers knew the answer and perhaps they did not have sufficient conviction to express. They waited for Ramakrishna to take the onus. At last Ramakrishna, a true devotee of Kalikamba, replied "Your Majesty, the feet of a Brahmin by character, are supposed to be equivalent to holy places. Hence the Brahmin is supposed to give salvation to the cows by wearing shoes made out of cow hide."

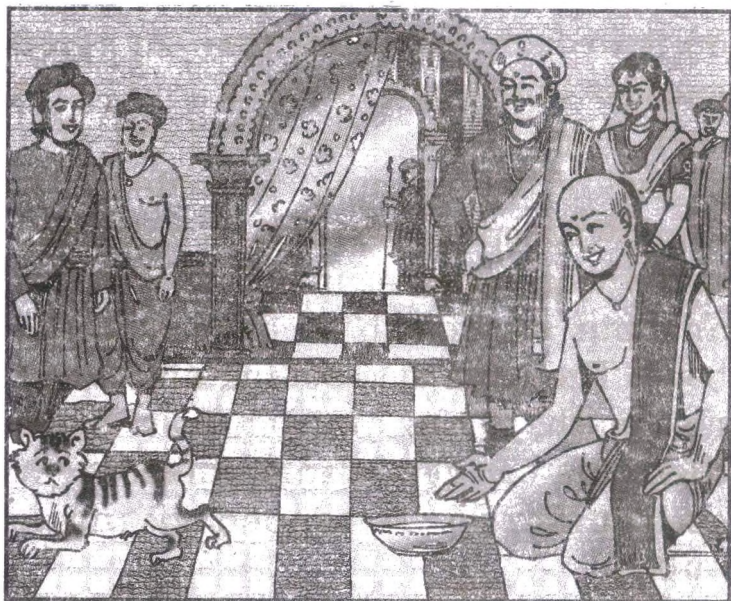
The king was satisfied.

9. A CAT FEARS MILK!



Krishnadevaraya once bought a few Persian cats. They were very cute. The king handed them over to the queen. The queen liked the cats and distributed them to her maids for bringing them up. Since Ramakrishna was also there at that time, she gave him also one warning him not to starve it as he did the horse. The queen gave everybody a cow also to feed the cats. Ramakrishna took both the cow and the cat to his house.

After some time, the queen wanted to check on the cats. All the cats were brought to her presence. Both the king and the queen felt happy, especially because Ramakrishna's cat was the plumpiest of them all. The queen ordered milk for all the cats. All the cats



except Ramakrishna's drank the milk . But Ramakrishna's cat ran away from the bowl of milk. The king sensed some mischief, caught it and saw to his horror there were marks of burnt skin around its mouth and asked an explanation from him.

“Your Majesty,” began Ramakrishna, “you know that the cats have the bad habit of drinking milk closing their eyes. I thought that they

do it in fear. I wanted this cat to be fearless and learn to drink milk with open eyes. Hence I kept in front of it a bowl of boiling milk. I scolded it to drink with open eyes. But disregarding my sincere advice, it closed its eyes and put its mouth at once into the bowl. The milk was boiling and burnt its mouth. It ran away in fear. Since then this cat gets afraid whenever it sees milk. So, I stopped giving it milk.”

“Then,” asked the king, “how come it is fat, in fact, fatter than the rest of the cats?”

“Oh, Majesty, there are many rats in my house, I let it free to roam. The cat fed itself on rats and some other birds. It was enjoying its freedom and food and hence has put on weight.”

“Then what happened to the cow?”

“Your Majesty, the cow is yielding tasty milk and my children and their

friends are drinking its milk very happily every day.”

The king and queen were also happy that at least the cat was not starving like the horse and told him to retain the cow and give back the cat to maids to look after it.

10. FREE LABOUR !



Thieves are experts in locating big monies in order to steal the riches. They come to know of them by observing people. Many people believed Ramakrishna became rich after he was appointed court minister. He was the one man who used to receive plenty of gifts from the king. They did not know that Ramakrishna was giving away to poor people the gifts he used receive from the king. A few

thieves thought he had accumulated lot of money and stored it in his house. They decided to break into his house one night and steal all that money.

One new moon night, they went to his house and were watching the inmates' movements. Ramakrishna came out after his dinner for a stroll and noticed the thieves. He was a man with a keen sense of humour and an ability to take advantage of any situation. He called out his wife and told sufficiently loudly to enable the thieves to overhear "I hear that thieveries are on the increase nowadays. It is better to keep our money safe." And he gestured his astonished wife to keep silent and continued, "I have therefore thought of a secret place where we can keep our money safe." His wife guessed by this time that her husband had noticed some thieves near their house. She also asked in the same tone "where?"

Ramakrishna lowered his voice a little but yet capable of being heard by the thieves "We will keep all our valuables in the big trunk and immerse it in our well. Nobody will search it there." His wife flattered him for the idea and both went inside. The thieves felt happy for they could finish their sinister job easily. They waited and saw Ramakrishna and his wife dragging out a big trunk with difficulty and throwing it into the well. They waited till they returned to their house and bolted the door. They came near the well and



inspected it. The well was wide and quite deep. They decided to draw out some water from the well so it would be easy to search for the trunk and bring it out of the well.

Ramakrishna had hidden himself and was watching them. He had decided to catch them when they were inside the well but when he heard their plan of draining out the water, he felt more relieved and also glad. For some reason, he had not watered the plants in his garden. He took a shovel and went into his garden unnoticed. The thieves started draining out water with the help of buckets and Ramakrishna went on channeling the water to the plants. This work went on for quite some time. Ramakrishna assessed that the water fed to plants was enough after a while.

The thieves also had become tired and were planning their next step. Just then, Ramakrishna shouted "Oh,

gentlemen, enough of water; all the plants are watered. Thank you for helping me.” The thieves got afraid at this unexpected voice. They thought they were mistaken for labourers and thought it wise to escape without losing any time. They ran away as silently as they had crept in!

Ramakrishna told his experience to the king the next day who appreciated his sense of humour and presence of mind in trying situations. The king also assured him he would tighten security measures in his kingdom.

11. ASTROLOGY IN LIFE



Krishnadevaraya was not merely a patron of arts and culture. He was a great warrior and added vast areas to the Vijayanagar Kingdom

making it the most powerful empire in India during his time. But he was surrounded by many enemies who were trying to defeat him. He had to fight a decisive war once with a strong enemy. He became a little worried. He wanted to know what would happen in the war and called the royal astrologer for advice.

The astrologer was learned in his subject. He consulted his books and almanacs and calculated the positions of stars and planets in conjunction with the birth stars of the king and told the king "Your Majesty, my advice is that you have to start your war at a particular time on a particular day after appeasing the gods in a particular way. Only then victory is assured." The king could not afford to follow his advice nor to disregard it having called him and asked for his advice.

The king thanked the astrologer and

sent him back. He looked at his favourite minister Ramakrishna who was present, yet, had not said anything. Ramakrishna was also not just a poet but had been blessed by Kalikamba with plenty of common sense. He too shared the king's predicament and told him "Your Majesty, let us go to the war field." The king always gave respect to Ramakrishna's words. Both went to the war field where the enemies had assembled their armies.

Ramakrishna made a keen observation and study of the enemies' strengths and weaknesses. He told Krishnadevaraya "Your Majesty, You are a great soldier and have seen many wars and won them. But as an expert analyst, I predict victory for you." The king, thought quite happy at his analysis, wanted details because he had his own reasons for not being able to follow his astrologer's advice and hence

had become apprehensive about the outcome of the war.'



Ramakrishna, in his characteristic and scientific way analysed the enemy for the king "Your Majesty, you can see in the enemy camp a large number of elephants and lesser number of horses but vast number of hand fighters. Now, look at your camp. You have fewer elephants, a large and powerful cavalry consisting of specially trained Persian horses and young and energetic

soldiers. Your weapons are modern. On the other hand, the enemies have old and traditional weapons and comparatively older soldiers. Your movements can be more agile and quicker due to these advantages. Your commanders are confident and highly experienced having fought under you in the previous wars. I would give far more number of chances of success to you rather than to the enemies.

“All that you have to do is to forget that you had ever consulted an astrologer, think like a great military strategist deciding to fix the positions of the various units of your army to strike the enemies’ elephants and make them to run back. That would create havoc in the enemy camp and your cavalry and infantry would move forward quickly and capture them.

“I wouldn’t pass any remarks about the advice of the astrologer but I dare

ask you a question: If the astrologer had predicted defeat, would you have surrendered yourself to the enemies without fighting?"

"Never, it is unthinkable," said the king vehemently, "I would fight till my last breath."

"Then," said Ramakrishna, "Forget what the astrologer said; I am not an atheist and I would recommend prayers to god. Not only myself but all your people will pray for your success. The right time for you to start the war is the time when the enemy is the weakest. Depending entirely on stars and planets is a sign of weakness and escapism. Astrology is one of the several guides a man has to consult. It is not a totally dependable science, nor is it totally negligible. Astrologers, as a general rule, vary from one another in the interpretations of future. It is for you to take whatever is positive and

reject the rest for the sake of a stimulant. What really matters, Your Majesty, is your faith in god and your right efforts for the right cause.”

The king never knew that Ramakrishna was such an extraordinary genius. He hugged him and told him that he would follow his advice. Now wonder, Krishnadevaraya went on winning all his wars.

12. GREATER THAN THE KING



After having won several wars, Krishnadevaraya became naturally proud. In fact he started thinking that he was the greatest. He had whatever he wanted. His speech smacked of egotism. Ramakrishna noticed this and as usual was waiting

for the right time. It happened one day when Krishnadevaraya elated over some incident boasted "Tell me, Ramakrishna, is there anybody who can defy me? Am I not the greatest?"

"There may be, My Lord," Ramakrishna was humble. "No one is the greatest in all respects and a person's position varies from time to time and situation to situation."

The king was in no mood to tolerate any contradiction. He lost his temper and demanded "Ramakrishna, tell me, 'who is it'? Tell me, 'where is such a person'? I shall kill whoever it is who defies or disobeys me. Or, I shall punish you for disagreeing with me."

Ramakrishna kept his cool as always and told him "Lord, have patience, in course of time, I shall prove to your satisfaction that there are persons who can handle you even physically and get away with it?"

Krishnadevaraya stared at him in anger and disbelief. He thought he would teach Ramakrishna a lesson this time!

Days passed and Ramakrishna waited. One day, the king was in Anthahpura (queen's chambers) and called Ramakrishna there for some work. Ramakrishna carried a baby also with him to the queen's chambers. The queen's attention was drawn naturally towards the baby. The baby was so cute, so attractive and so beautiful that the queen forgot the court manners and went on hugging it, cajoling it and kissing it that all her maids and the king were attracted by the commotion she was making. The baby wetted her royal dress. But it did not bother her. She changed her dress and treated it as if it was a casual matter.

The king felt rather disturbed and looked at the baby. It was all innocence



personified! In an instant the king forgot his work with Ramakrishna and Ramakrishna himself. He took the baby in his hands from the queen and he also hugged and kissed it. The baby looked at the impressive moustache of the king and pulled it to its face. That made the king more affectionate and he again kissed the baby. The baby's saliva fell on his face and dress. The king wiped the saliva and cuddled it more.

Suddenly he became aware of Ramakrishna and felt awkward for expressing his personal emotions in his presence. Ramakrishna had brought the baby for his own purpose and it was served. "Your Majesty," he asked. "now forget the child. I have come here for clarifying about a punishment. Would you not punish severely, may be even with death sentence, anybody who would indulge in such heinous acts as urinating on your beloved queen or spitting on your face or dragging you with your moustache?"

The king felt Ramakrishna was stupid to ask for such clarifications and rebuked him "How could you ask for such clarifications, Ramakrishna, don't you know who I am? A great emperor who is praised by one and all?"

"Then, My Lord," exclaimed Ramakrishna "that baby did all that I mentioned and you didn't do a thing to

stop it. You and the queen were happy surrendering yourselves to all its pranks. You were never angry and never did any thing to punish it. Now don't you think it is great? Don't you agree that circumstances decide the status of a person?"

The king remembered their discussion some time back and agreed to what he explained.

13. BRAIN OR BRAWN ?



Krishnadevaraya's court used to attract all kinds of visitors. Different visitors had different purposes. One such visitor was a great wrestler from a far off place. He had won all his bouts in other kingdoms and wished to include Vijayanagar also en route. Merely looking at his abnormal physique, the

Vijayanagar wrestlers got afraid and were most unwilling to accept his challenge. They knew they were certainly no match for his strength. They were discussing amongst themselves whether they could do any thing at all to save their prestige and that of Vijayanagar. They could not decide on any safe way out. One wrestler suggested Ramakrishna's name. Finally they all decided that none of them could defeat the wrestler on the field and only Ramakrishna could help them with his native intelligence.

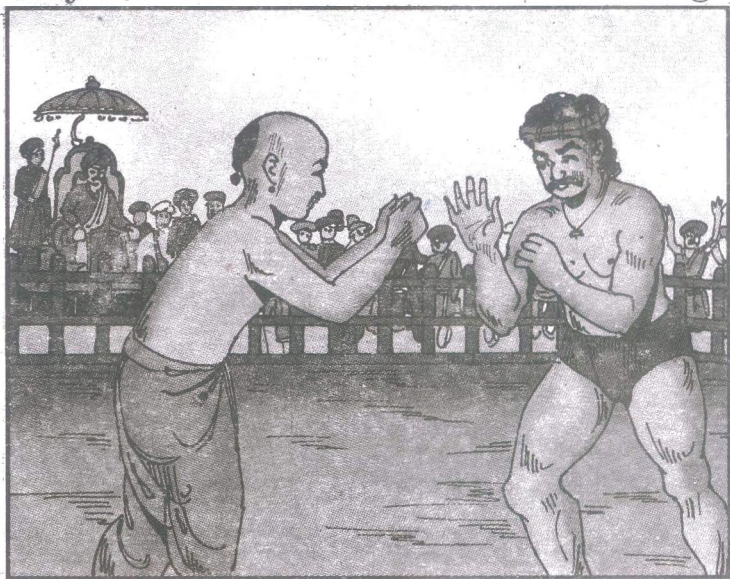
Ramakrishna thought about the seriousness of the issue and agreed with them that a straight wrestling bout with him was ruled out. However, he assured them that he would think of a way out. He told them to fix a date for the challenge and on that date he himself would get on to the field to face him. The wrestlers were bewildered.

They could not visualise this frail Brahmin wrestling with a mountain of a man who could throw several strong wrestlers with a single hand.

Ramakrishna told them that he had a plan and according to that they had to take him in a decorated chair (Pallakki) to the field (Akhada). He would wear around his neck countless medals borrowed from them and they should treat him as their teacher at the Akhada showing due respect.

The wrestlers were in such a hopeless situation that they were willing to do any thing just to avoid ignominy. Keeping trust in Ramakrishna, they followed his advice. Even the king was not aware of Ramakrishna's plans till the last moment when he saw him on the Akhada. The king began to wonder whether Ramakrishna had gone mad to fight physically. And many courtiers

and people agreed with him. The challenging wrestler was on the field waiting for the bout. Ramakrishna's Pallakki was brought down on the field with salutatory slogans and the chief wrestler of Vijayanagar introduced him as their teacher and told him that it was their custom that the challenger should answer a few questions put by their Guru (Teacher). He explained that their teacher was not only a wrestler but was very learned in the science of wrestling.



And if the challenger failed to answer their Guru's simple questions, he had to accept defeat because the teacher considered it below his dignity to fight with anybody who did not measure up to his standards.

The wrestler thought over it. He had never faced such a situation in his life. But being a successful wrestler, he was confident that there was nothing in the art and science of wrestling that he could not handle. This overconfidence, he never thought, would put him in such a fix or hold that he could never come out successfully. His was brawn power and he was facing a man with brain power!

Ramakrishna stood on the Akhada, looked at the challenger and gestured as if he was blessing him in the tradition of teachers of wrestling. This disturbed him a little for all these customs were new to him and were

artificially stage-managed to create a feeling in him that he was going to meet a Guru rather than a wrestler. Ramakrishna knew that he had to kill his opponent psychologically first before resorting to any other tricks. The king and the audience were watching all that was going on in the arena with unabated attention and uncertain ideas.

Ramakrishna stood in the centre of the field: With masterly movements, he put his right foot forward and touched the challenger's chest with his right hand and then himself with his left hand. Then he clasped both his palms together forcefully. Then he pointed his right index finger in the direction where the ladies were sitting, knotted both the right and left index fingers, took some mud in his right hand and gestured as if he was pouring it into his mouth and looked at his chief wrestler.

The chief wrestler who was briefed earlier addressed the champion and asked him "Dear wrestler, these signs are simple signs in the science of wrestling which are put to a challenger by a guru. If you fail to explain them, it is evident that you do not belong to the elite and learned class of wrestlers. Mere possessing of a huge body does not qualify you to be admitted to select group. Now please answer my guru's questions or get lost like Karna, the Sootha puthra (son of a member of an inferior caste) since you don't have a godfather like Duryodhana here."

The wrestler who made no head or tail of Ramakrishna's antique gestures and was in the midst of strangers got nonplussed and nervous. He shook his massive body and stone-like head and finally decided it was better to surrender and quit rather than exhibit his ignorance.

So, the great wrestling champion lost without fighting and a man who was never a wrestler won without fighting!

Everyone including the king was tense through out and sighed in relief! The king who was wondering at those winning(!) gestures asked Ramakrishna to explain. "Oh, Majesty," said Ramakrishna, "they were the gestures of my helplessness and frustration! I was confessing to him in my language that if he, such a great and real champion fights with a weakling like me, I would be crushed to death. And my wife sitting in the gallery would have to eat mud after my death. But I had instructed the chief wrestler to speak to the challenger in loud, fearful, overbearing and resounding tone so as to shake his confidence. It was our luck that our drama ended to our advantage."

The emperor of one of the greatest empires was not at all happy. This was the second time that Ramakrishna had saved the honour of his court, the first being the case of Thila Kaashta Mahisha Bandhana. He took his wrestlers to task severely and asked Ramakrishna to take charge of the sport and send all the wrestlers for higher training by really great teachers.

14. JEALOUSY WEARS COMMUNAL GARB



Appalacharya was a family priest of the king Krishnadevaraya and also related to him. He was a good scholar respected by all for his scholarship and used to be consulted by the king now and then on certain matters. But Appalacharya

was not happy with this recognition. He thought that he was more intelligent and cleverer than Ramakrishna but was denied his due position. He could not bear that while he was only a priest, the latter was elevated to the post of a minister. He was irritated whenever anybody flattered Ramakrishna. He became jealous and started degrading and talking derisively with him.

He began hatching of various means by hook or by crook of destroying Ramakrishna's reputation. He went even to the extent of spreading the rumour that the king was partial to Smartha sect and he was not made a minister because he belonged to Vaishnava sect. He reflected that he could gather the support of members of his sect by misleading them. He started telling his sect members that Ramakrishna hated Vaishnavites, that he was an inferior man and such other

rubbish just to bring down his popularity and enhance his own status in society.

The king was not aware of the nefarious activities of his relative cum family priest. But Ramakrishna being affected directly was wondering what harm he had done to Appalacharya to instigate such negative reactions from him. One day, he had to go to Appalacharya's house early in the morning to meet him on duty. Appalacharya, who hated Ramakrishna covered his face as soon as he came near him. Ramakrishna spoke to him about his work and before taking leave of him asked "Acharya, please tell me why you covered your face when you saw me?"

He replied sarcastically "Don't you know, Ramakrishna, that if we Vaishnavites look at Smarthas first thing in the morning, we will take birth again as donkeys?"

Ramakrishna felt offended and deeply hurt. He had more personal and intimate Vaishnavite friends than this Appalacharya had and decided then and there to teach this man a bitter lesson as he had done to Subbashasthri. He realized that this man was overcome more by personal jealousy than any religious fervour and could do anything to please himself. He had read books but had not absorbed the true teachings of the great sages. He spoke by the books but acted by base instincts unlike his true Vaishnavite friends.

On one occasion, the king went out in the city with his courtiers for an inspection. Both Ramakrishna and Appalacharya were in the group. On their way, they saw a few donkeys grazing in a nearby field. Suddenly, Ramakrishna left the group and went to the donkeys, bowed with all humility lying on the ground. The whole group



looked at Ramakrishna's antics in consternation. The king being accustomed to his eccentric ways was wondering who could be his victim this time; so, directly asked him to explain his grievence "Do those donkeys look like saints to you?"

"Your Majesty, I have no grievence whatsoever. When I had gone to Appalacharya's house a few days back on duty early in the morning, he covered

his face when he saw me and clarified that Vaishnavites who see Smarthas first thing in the morning become donkeys in their next birth. Hence when I saw the donkeys here, I guessed they must be Appalacharya's relatives and deemed it my duty to beg their pardon on behalf of the Smarthas whose faces his relatives must have seen in their previous births.

“Your Majesty, I have no ill-will towards Appalacharya or towards any human being. I have done no harm to him or to anybody. I only know that there is one Supreme power by whatever name you may call it. And we are what we are by His will.”

The king was quick to feel Ramakrishna's agony and grasped what had happened because a few courtiers also disclosed the misdeeds of Appalacharya. The king thought for a while and analyzed the behaviour of

Appalacharya. Finally he told "Appalacharya, you should have faith in me. You think that I discriminate people on the basis of their religion or language. It is totally false. You are fully aware of my intentions. This kingdom has been built on the basis of the great sage Vidyaranya's teachings. I have followed my predecessors in all matters of our kingdom. I recognize merit and merit alone and no other extraneous issues for I want my kingdom to survive and flourish. I give equal opportunities to you and to all others. You show your merit and I assure openly here I shall recognize you. Instead, if you indulge in deeds unworthy of your position, I shall be very happy to get rid of you with suitable punishment.

"This is my advice as well as warning to you. Take it in the right spirit and become a better man."

Appalacharya begged the king to pardon him and assured him and Ramakrishna that he would never behave as before and pledge his life for the welfare of the kingdom.

15. RAMAKRISHNA'S WEALTH



In spite of thieves failing to find anything worthwhile in Ramakrishna's house, many courtiers and others did believe that Ramakrishna had accumulated and saved enormous money somewhere in his house. They thought that Ramakrishna was only pretending that he was not rich and had managed to hoodwink the thieves. Even the king assumed that he and his family must be enjoying a

luxurious life as he used to receive valuable gifts frequently from him. The jealous courtiers used to comment openly that he had become one of the richest man in the kingdom and a few of them spread rumours that he was also making money illegally. It is said that if a lie is repeated over and over, it begins to appear like truth.

The king got suspicious after hearing such comments. Ramakrishna made no efforts to defend himself or convince the king. His life was an open book and anybody could go through it. But the wicked courtiers went on building pressure on the king that he must punish Ramakrishna and stop him from looting the treasury. The king thought that he must investigate the matter personally before taking any action. He decided to visit Ramakrishna's house incognito and check on his own.

The king gave some work to Ramakrishna to make him spend his time in the palace and he himself went out to his house hiding his identity like a beggar. To his surprise, he saw a crowd of beggars outside his house waiting patiently. A few children in ordinary clothes came out of the house with vessels and boxes. The king recognized them to be Ramakrishna's children for he had seen them earlier. The children started distributing food and clothes to the beggars.

There were a few more people who did not want food or clothes but were standing and waiting inside the house. The king also joined them and casually asked why they were waiting. They told they had bigger needs. A lady came out to meet them. She too was dressed in simple attire and wore ordinary jewels. The king recognized her as Ramakrishna's wife. He did not see any



jewel given by him on her person. The lady enquired every person and gave them a little money or a jewel according to their needs. When the king's turn came, he told a big tragic tale effectively. Ramakrishna's wife felt sorry for him and told him that she had only one big jewel left that the king had given her husband and that she would give it to him in full belief that he would use it for his purpose. The king

promised her, took it, wished her and her family and returned.

The king made another test. He arranged a function and invited all the important guests who included Ramakrishna and his family. The king specified that it was a family get-together and all should come well dressed. All the courtiers, high ranking officials and very important persons of the society came to the function. Men and especially women were vying with one other with superb dresses and exotic jewellery. They all wanted appreciation from the king. But the king had his eye only on Ramakrishna and his family members. Ramakrishna was in his usual simple dress and his wife wore an attractive saree but which could not be classified under expensive category and traditional jewellery which looked like gifts from her parents or bought from ordinary jewellery

shops. His children also wore good but inexpensive dresses. The king noticed that the courtiers who used to complain and their families were dazzling in rich attire and expensive ornaments.

The party was celebrated well and the king was careful to keep his thoughts to himself. However, he decided to conduct one more test. He told Ramakrishna about a holy place and sent him and his entire family to the holy place at his cost for a couple of days. He then disguised himself as a thief one night and broke into his house. He checked all the nooks and corners, trunks and big vessels and hiding places in his house. All he could find were ordinary house-hold goods, books and more books. He scattered the goods in the house to give an indication of burglary and returned to his palace.

He was convinced fully and firmly that a good man has a few enemies and

an extra-ordinary man has countless enemies whose only business in life was to discredit them. They become a nuisance to the progress of the society. But the king was helpless for he could not punish such people for want of legal evidences. Instead, he began to give more and more respect and affection to Ramakrishna from then onwards.

16. A COSTLY GIFT !



The Forest Department of the King reported finding a big herd of elephants and domesticating them. He was pleased with the news and gave them away as gifts to other kings and his dear ones. As Ramakrishna was standing there, the king gave him also five elephants. Ramakrishna was shocked but could not refuse as the king was in a joyous mood. He took them to his house and was

scolded by his wife. They had no place to keep them or food to feed them. His wife told him that he should have asked for cows instead. She then came to know that the king had voluntarily given them.

At last, they decided to set them free. They put seals of Kalikamba on their heads and untied them. The elephants started roaming on the streets of Vijayanagara. People who saw them gave them some food. But the food was insufficient to them and in a few days, they became troublesome. They had the seal of Kalikamba on their heads so, people were afraid of taking their possession or hurting them. They reported the matter to the king that there were five such elephants. The king guessed that they must be the ones he gave to Ramakrishna.

When he verified the problem, Ramakrishna confessed "Your Majesty,



you know I am a poor man. But I had no courage to refuse when you gave them to me with good intentions. You have no idea that they are a great punishment to poor people in cities. We cannot find any work or food for them. I, therefore, had no alternative to release them. I was hopeful they would return to forest, may be, they could not find their way. I beg you to understand my plight and pardon me.”

The king blamed himself for what he did for it is said that the way to hell

is paved with good intentions. He agreed with Ramakrishna and without his asking gave five cows and some money for their initial maintenance.

17. ART SENSE OR COMMON SENSE ?



An other day an other visitor came to the Vijayanagar Court. He was a painter and showed his paintings to the king. The king was impressed and decided to get some paintings for the palace done by the visitor. But it so happened that Ramakrishna was also there and he was watching a particular work keenly. The king also looked at it; it was a beautiful picture of a deer. The king appreciated Ramakrishna's sense of beauty. But he

was in for a shock! Ramakrishna exclaimed "Your Majesty, this deer has only one ear." The king also noticed the mistake but could not pass any remark for fear of being called ignorant in matters of art by the painter. But Ramakrishna had no such false notions about himself and pointed it out to the painter.

The painter discerned that the king was not fully conversant with the art of painting and could ignore Ramakrishna. He did not want to accept his blunder and started browbeating both of them with high-sounding terms. He explained that the deer was seriously staring at something to its right and so its left ear was hidden from the viewer. But what irritated Ramakrishna was his remark that ordinary people could not understand his works because they lacked the fine sense of appreciating a work of art and only an artist and not a common man

like Ramakrishna could evaluate his great works. The king was not fully convinced but didn't say anything. However, Ramakrishna prevented the king from giving immediate orders for painting. He requested the king that he too would show him some of his own paintings tomorrow. The king agreed and told the painter to visit him the next day.

The next day both the king and the painter were horrified to see Ramakrishna's two paintings. The first one had a title "Grass" and the second one had a title "Horse" but both were blank. Ramakrishna explained both together constitute the subject of a horse eating grass. The king and the painter looked blank. The painter looking at the picture of the so-called horse, asked him "Where is the horse?"

Ramakrishna replied "It has gone to eat the grass, so you can't see it."

“Then where is the grass?” asked the painter looking at the second so-called painting of grass.

“The horse has eaten all the grass, so you cannot see the grass.”

“Then where is the horse?” both the king and the painter got irritated and questioned him.

Ramakrishna replied calmly “Why will the horse stay here after eating all the grass? It has gone away in search of another pasture. That is why you can’t see it here. You see, it requires great imagination to understand the fine art of painting.”

The painter felt ashamed and confessed that he had forgotten to paint the ear of the deer but since he was afraid that if he agreed to his fault the king might not give him orders. He begged to be forgiven and was about to leave the place. But Ramakrishna stopped him and

requested the king to give him orders because he was really a great painter. The king, as usual, agreed with Ramakrishna that in addition to art sense, one should have common sense.

18. BORN TO BE FREE!



A hunter brought a very beautiful parrot as a present to the king. The king and the queen both loved it and kept it in a silver cage in their chambers. They both spent their considerable time with it feeding it with special fruits and seeds. In course of time they also taught it several words like Bhajans (prayers) and greetings. They assumed it was a special bird that deserved to live in the palace.

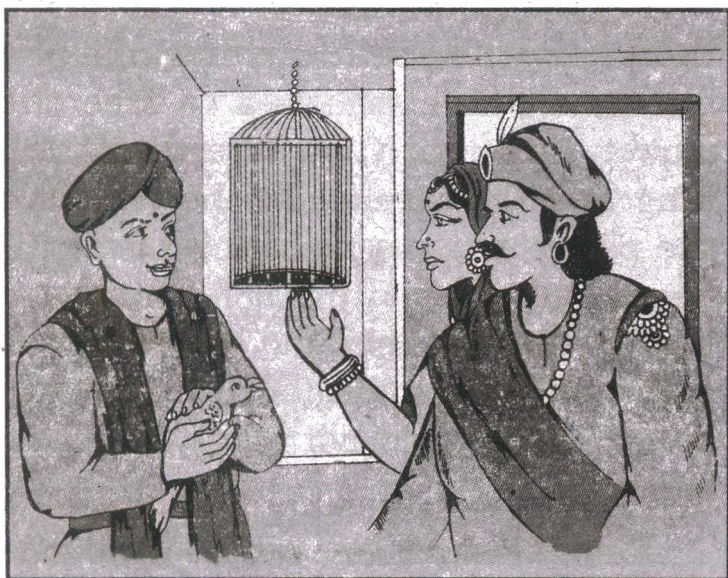
One day Ramakrishna happened to

go to their chambers and was surprised to hear a parrot welcoming him. It also spoke a few words of Bhajan. The king and queen both told him that the parrot was a special bird that desired to live in style in the palace. They had both taken on themselves the authority to speak for the parrot for they loved it so much. But Ramakrishna stood for freedom. He never liked birds or animals being kept in cages.

But he knew that he would make them angry if he said anything contrary but he was determined to free the parrot. Apparently, he agreed with the king and the queen. But he told that the parrot tries to imitate whatever it hears and especially if it fetches some food in return. They did not believe it and challenged him that their bird was special and would not learn unholy or bad words.

Ramakrishna took up the challenge

and asked them for permission to take the bird with him for a few days. He bet with them that they would hate the bird when it returned with him. The king and the queen both agreed to grant him whatever he asked if he proved his point. Ramakrishna carried the bird with him to a bird trainer, paid him very well and asked him to teach such words as 'the king is a crook' and 'the queen is ugly'. The bird trainer took assurance



from Ramakrishna that he would not be punished.

After training, Ramakrishna took the parrot back to the queen's chambers. He was careful to keep it hungry for a long time before taking it back. When the parrot started shrieking 'The king is a crook and the queen is ugly' both the king and the queen got so angry and wild with Ramakrishna that they thought he had cast a spell on their bird.

Ramakrishna begged for their pardon and said "Your Majesties, my intentions were and are not to bring bad names to you. I, only wanted to remind you of a basic fact of nature that all species of living beings are born free and wish to remain free and lead free lives. But we human beings are too greedy and wish all other living beings to live at our mercy. Since might is quite often used to fulfill our desires, these simple

and helpless birds and animals follow our commands especially when they are put in cages and either threatened or attracted with punishment or food."

The king and the queen were not fully convinced. They doubted his words and asked "If what you say is true, the bird should fly away when the cage is opened. If it flies away, we will agree that we lost the bet. If it does not, then you lose the bet. Is it okay?" Ramakrishna consented. The queen opened the cage herself, confident that it will sit on her hand or shoulder. But the bird saw there was no food with her or with the king. Being hungry it flew at once out into the garden and from there out into the sky in search of food and its flock. Both the king and the queen were crestfallen not because they lost the bet but because they lost the company of such a lovely bird. With great disappointment on their faces,

they asked Ramakrishna what he wanted. True to his nature, he told that he got what he wanted when the bird flew away to its freedom!

19. A LESSON WITH INTEREST !



Nakul was a rich money lender in Vijayanagar. He used to lend not only money but other articles also like vessels and furniture for functions.

He became rich by unfair means. He was exploiting the needy people by charging abnormal rates of interest and cheating the illiterate people by showing false accounts. It was 'once a borrower, always a borrower' with him. And any small damage to vessels or other articles meant, the borrower had to pay almost the cost of

the articles towards repairs. As his business increased, his greed also grew without limits.

The hapless borrowers took their case to Ramakrishna and requested him to solve their problems. Ramakrishna felt sad hearing their stories of exploitation and decided to set him right. He sent one of his trusted staff to the money lender after briefing him what he had to do. His staff member asked the money lender that he wanted to borrow some vessels for a function in his house. Nakul selected some good and big vessels and gave him. Ramakrishna's assistant asked Nakul to count the vessels properly so that there should be no doubts at the time of return.

After one or two days, he returned those vessels along with an equal number of small but similar vessels. Nakul asked the assistant for the



reason. He replied “ Oh Sahib, perhaps, they were pregnant and delivered their babies in my place. As the vessels belonged to you, I thought it was just that I return their babies also to you.” The money lender was such a greedy man that he did not want to miss this opportunity of adding some vessels free of cost convincing himself that the assistant must be an idiot. He also pretended “Yes, yes, I had overlooked that fact. I am happy that you are an

honest man. Don't hesitate to come to me for any business. I am here to help you."

After a month, the assistant went to the money lender. The money lender was happy to receive him! The assistant told him that he had a very big function at his house and needed many vessels of all dimensions. The greedy money lender became very happy at the thought of as many free vessels. He put all the vessels on a cart and made it a point to tell the assistant "You see, last time I had forgotten but you were honest. I don't want to do the same mistake this time. So I am telling you in advance all those vessels are pregnant and may deliver any moment. Be careful about them, don't lose the babies and bring back all the vessels with their babies after your function is completed."

The money lender waited for many

days with eagerness but the assistant did not return. The money lender went personally to his house and asked his customer why he did not return the vessels immediately. The assistant told him "Sir, I am so sorry to tell you that all the vessels died at the time of their delivery. In fact, I finished performing their death ceremonies just now and was about to come to your place to inform you." The money lender got enraged so much that a big quarrel broke out between them. People crowded witnessing this *thamasha* (fun) of pregnant vessels.

As the quarrel was not sorted out there, the money lender went directly to the king for justice. Ramakrishna was also there. The king recognized the customer as the assistant of Ramakrishna and assumed there must be some thing wrong with the money lender. He was sure there must be

Ramakrishna's hand in this deal. Before the proceedings began, he got reports from his staff about the money lender and came to know about his unfair ways of business and how he was cheating the poor and helpless people. He discussed the matter with Ramakrishna and agreed to punish him.

The king asked the money lender "Did you accept or not accept the extra vessels your customer gave you saying that your vessels delivered them?"

"Yes, My Lord, I accepted them."

"Did you or did you not know at that time that vessels do not become pregnant and do not deliver?"

"I knew that vessels are inanimate objects and do not become pregnant."

"Nakul, knowing fully well you decided to accept those extra vessels out of greed. Now I will give you an opportunity to reimburse all the money

you have collected from your customers by unscrupulous means. You will get back all the vessels this particular customer took from you. That was done to teach you a lesson in interest. You must undertake that henceforth you will charge your customers only that rate of interest which is approved by my Finance Minister. If you don't want this option, you will be sentenced to imprisonment on charges of fraud. What do you say?"

"My Lord, my choice is obvious. I want to be your faithful citizen. Henceforth I shall strive to earn a good name rather than more money."

The king looked at Ramakrishna who thanked his impartiality and fair justice. The unfortunate victims of the money lender thanked Ramakrishna for his leadership.

20. WHO IS CONTENTED?



The king had everything at his command except peace of mind. He had no freedom for even a minute with problems surrounding him from all the sides all the time. He

was worried. In this mental frame he saw Ramakrishna coming to meet him. He reflected in his mind that Ramakrishna did not have as much wealth or power as he had but yet was a happy man, always smiling and jovial. He never hesitated to poke fun at himself if that created some laughter. He asked Ramakrishna "I know, even though I have not kept a record, I have given many valuable gifts enough to have made you a rich man. But you have not saved them and are leading a simple life. Have you ever thought of your

family and of saving some money for them?"

Ramakrishna became pensive. The king felt he spoke to Ramakrishna seriously and made him realize his responsibilities other than the official ones. He also told him "I know you have given away considerable amount of your earnings as charity. Hence I shall give you some more money which you must use to build a house for yourself and be a contented man."

One could not say whether Ramakrishna was happy or not. He told the king that he had certain views about life that made him a contented man. The king asked him to prove it. Ramakrishna accepted the challenge and also to build a house with the king's money for himself. He requested the king to sanction him leave.

For several months, Ramakrishna became busy in building a house. He

consulted the architect, the builders, artists and all people connected with building a house. He gave personal attention so that aesthetics and utility were matched perfectly in designing the house. There was neither extravagance nor paucity in any aspect. Finally the house was ready for occupation. Even the king was impressed very much and advised him to perform the function to please the gods before actual occupation.

Ramakrishna did perform the house-warming function and pleased both gods in the heaven and people on earth. But he hung a big board in front of the house on which was written in big and bold letters:

THIS HOUSE WILL BE GIVEN
FREE TO ANYBODY WHO THINKS
HE OR SHE IS CONTENTED IN
LIFE.

He left the house unoccupied and open and continued to live in his old house. He requested the king to wait and watch!

Ramakrishna's offer became a hot topic for discussion not only in Vijayanagar kingdom but far and wide. The house was so beautiful and set in such serene environment that people used to visit it to get peace of mind. Many, many people wanted to own it and went to the committee of the king and Ramakrishna with fantastic arguments that they were contented in life and so deserved to possess the house! Initially the king was getting amused and used to laugh at the hypocritical arguments of the contenders! None of them realized that a contented man never needed such a house. It was sheer selfishness that prompted them to put up their claims and were frank and foolish enough to

admit that they would be very happy to receive the house! They could not grasp that they were indirectly admitting that not getting the house would make them disappointed!

Ramakrishna told the king at last "Your Majesty, contentment is a mental state irrespective of physical possessions. If you link your peace of mind to physical desires, you will be depriving yourself of the pure joy of living in free nature. All the essential things in life like air, water, food like fruits, berries and vegetables that grow on their own in forests and greenery are freely given by god to all the people. But how many people are making use of such free gifts of god? All of us including Your Majesty and myself are busy fulfilling our desires and setting our eyes on new desires and again striving to fulfill them and thus throwing ourselves willingly into the cycle of no

returns. As examples, you met several claimants who had owned already one or more houses.

“Therefore, Your Majesty, I have limited ambitions as regards the future of my children. I educate them and leave the rest to themselves. My wife and I share the same views and hence we have no dissensions.

“Therefore, Your Majesty, I am contented as I am.”

The king said “Ramakrishna, you are a great man blessed by Kalikamba Herself! I shall strive to follow your advice as far as it is applicable to a king who is responsible for his people. But what are you going to do about the house?”

Ramakrishna replied without any heartburns “Let the house serve the people. I leave it to your discretion.”

21. THE KING PUNISHES RAMAKRISHNA !



The Golconda king wanted to kill Krishnadevaraya and because he could not defeat Raya in war he sent an assassin to Vijayanagar. The assassin made a detailed study of Vijayanagar, its people, courtiers, the king and people who were close to the king. He chose Ramakrishna because he noticed that the king used to trust him. Then he studied Ramakrishna's family. He came to know his wife's brother had run away from his house when she was very young. He chose the time when Ramakrishna was not at home and visited her. He introduced himself as her long lost brother Trilok.

He narrated a big tale that he traveled far and wide did big business and had become very rich. He presented her with costly sarees, cosmetics, jewels and other gifts. He also gave away toys, books, dresses and so on to her children. His story was so full of emotions, repentances and anecdotes that she believed him to be her real brother. She was a simple and innocent lady and trusted him. She welcomed him with affection, spoke about her husband and cooked him a feast. Ramakrishna returned by that time and was wondering at the loud voices in his house.

His wife introduced the assassin as her own brother who had run away when he was young. She was so much hypnotized by the assassin that she spoke to Ramakrishna as if whatever he had told her was true. Ramakrishna also, who had not seen her brother trusted him welcomed him cordially.

After some time, the assassin pretended to take leave of them. Ramakrishna's wife who had by then convinced herself that he was her brother forced him to stay in their house for a few days. Ramakrishna also joined her in requesting him. The assassin pretended he agreed to stay because of their hearty hospitality. He said he would stay for some time so that he could explore business opportunities in Vijayanagar.

But he was actually waiting for an opportunity to kill the king. He studied Ramakrishna's handwriting and his signature and practiced to imitate them. After a few days, there was a fair in the city and Ramakrishna and his family planned to visit it. The assassin pretended he had headache and remained at home. After they left, the assassin waited for the night to set in and sent a letter to the king through a messenger. He had forged

Ramakrishna's handwriting and signature so well that the king also took it for granted. The assassin had written in that letter that the king should come alone to his house at once to see something very important and confidential.

The king had no reason to fear and so entered Ramakrishna's house even though it was dark inside the house. No sooner he entered than the assassin swung his sword but Raya was experienced and trained in such attacks. He easily escaped and caught hold of the assassin. Tying him up thoroughly, Raya took him to the palace where he was made to confess after due tortures.

Ramakrishna felt ashamed of himself for all his intelligence he did not discern the cunningness of the stranger. He blamed himself entirely for trusting his wife and begged the king that he be punished. The king knew the tricks of



enemies and told him not to worry much about the incident as he had gone to his house fully prepared. He told Ramakrishna that though the letter appeared to be in his handwriting, he suspected there was some thing abnormal in the language and the request.

Still, Ramakrishna was not convinced and insisted that he had not done his duty. He should have been wary of strangers and failed miserably,

so he deserved some punishment. The king thought about it and told him "Ramakrishna, for harbouring the king's enemies, the punishment is death. But I know you are one of my most trusted and loyal citizens. To err is human. Hence I give you the option of choosing your own way of death." He knew Ramakrishna wanted to exhibit the king's impartiality and that no one is above law. He also knew that Ramakrishna's native intelligence would save him from any tight corner.

Ramakrishna replied "Your Majesty, I accept the punishment. I also want to announce that you are a noble king. May God bless you. As you have given me the freedom to choose the way of my death, I hereby seek your acceptance that I be permitted to die of old age."

The king and Ramakrishna's family and friends roared with laughter with a sigh of relief and happiness.

22. RAMAKRISHNA STEALS BRINJALS !



A king sent a special variety of brinjals to Krishnadevaraya as a gift. Raya came to know their speciality only after cooking and eating them. They had no seeds inside

and melted easily in the mouth. The royal cook had made a special dish and the king relished them so much that he ordered the gardener to grow them in the royal garden. Ramakrishna who was with the king at the time of dinner also relished them so much that he helped himself with several servings. The king ordered the gardener to be very careful about them and arrange for extra security so that no body should steal them.

Ramakrishna told his wife about the

seedless brinjals he had consumed in the palace and flattered the dish as exotic. His wife had not heard of seedless variety and became inquisitive and stubborn about eating them. She said she too would cook such a dish using the same recipe of the royal cook. She would enquire her husband everyday whether the plants had grown the brinjals. And when the brinjals grew sufficiently ripe, she started pestering him to fetch them home. Ramakrishna told her that the king had ordered special security for them and would not part with them.

But Ramakrishna's wife would have none of that; the more Ramakrishna advised her the more adamant she became. She wanted them at any cost! Ultimately, Ramakrishna yielded to his wife's demand and decided to steal only a few brinjals so that the king would not come to know of it. He went to the royal garden that night fully masked



and very skillfully stole a few brinjals and brought them home without getting caught! His wife cooked them immediately. By then their son was sleeping outside and Ramakrishna wanted only two of them to eat them without telling their son. But his wife was a mother and could not agree to his advice. So, Ramakrishna went out with a bucketful of water and sprinkled the water on his son. His son got up drenched. He uttered it was raining and

came inside fully awake. All three of them ate the special brinjal dish to their heart's content and slept.

The next morning there was a big commotion in the royal kitchen. All were shivering at the theft of the special brinjals. The king ordered an enquiry immediately but neither the gardener nor the security could find out who stole them. Fortunately, the king was happy that not all the brinjals were stolen. All the same he wanted to know who could steal from the royal garden and relish the dish like him. He at once suspected Ramakrishna! But he had no evidence to prove it even though his gardener told that Ramakrishna used to go to the garden and admire the plants and brinjals.

He reflected in his mind that if Ramakrishna had stolen them, then his son also must have eaten the dish and he knew very well that children never

told lies. So, he arranged his son to come to the palace on some pretext and asked him "Oh son, have you eaten brinjal dish?"

"Yes Majesty," replied Ramakrishna's son "it was very tasty."

"And when was it?" the king was sure he was about to catch the thief.

"That is," the boy tried to remember and suddenly said "that was yesterday when it was raining heavily and I got drenched. I was sleeping outside and awoke because of the heavy rain. I went inside, ate the brinjal dish and went to sleep."

The king gave up! But his suspicion continued and he knew how to catch Ramakrishna. He announced that he would not punish the thief but would, on the other hand, reward him for adoring the brinjal like himself. No sooner he announced, than the thief

came forward and got the assurance once again from the king and confessed that because of his wife, he had stolen only a few because he felt shy of asking the king for brinjals of all the things and without losing time stretched his hands to receive the reward.

Ramakrishna, stole and received a reward also!

23. RAMAKRISHNA IMPRESSES BABAR



Ramakrishna's fame spread far and wide. The far off Mughal emperor heard about him and sent an invitation through the Vijayanagar Emperor Krishnadevaraya. While both felt happy about the invitation, Krishnadevaraya warned Ramakrishna to be wary of the strangers, fully

equipped him and sent him along with a few body guards. They reached the Sultan's Darbar safely.

Ramakrishna faced two great obstacles: the first being the language. His body guard knew Hindi well but not enough to translate the wit and wisdom and subtle humour in the original flavour. The second being the narrow minded attitude of Babar not to admit that there could be a man outside his kingdom who was brilliant. Ramakrishna's suspicions were confirmed when neither Babar nor any of his courtiers, even a few who knew Ramakrishna's language, were stony faced and tight-lipped at whatever Ramakrishna spoke. It became plain that Babar had issued instructions that no one should entertain him, no matter, what he said or did.

Saint Basaveshwara has said "*that it is possible for anybody to wake up a*

man who is really sleeping but it is impossible to wake up a man who is pretending that he is sleeping." That was what happened in Babar's court. No one even presented a pleasant face let alone smiling. They behaved as if there was nothing special or noteworthy in what he presented. But Ramakrishna was not the man to give up easily. They did not know his mettle. He decided to confront Babar in a different way and stopped going to his court. After a few days of his absence, Babar guessed he must have returned out of shame. He felt very happy for succeeding in insulting Ramakrishna and thanked all his courtiers.

One evening Babar went outside his city on work. On the way he saw an old Fakir (a wandering Muslim saint) struggling to plant a coconut sapling. He accosted the Fakir "Why are you struggling to plant this coconut at this



age? Do you hope to live till it gives fruits?”

“Certainly not, Your Majesty, those grown-up trees were planted by my elders. I ate the fruits from those trees. Now it is my turn to plant so that my next generation would enjoy.”

Babar felt very happy at the Fakir's civic sense and gave a bag of gold coins in appreciation. The Fakir said “Your Majesty, a simple good wish of mine got

me a gift. normally a tree gives fruits when it grows up but this tree gave me a big gift as soon as it was planted. Praise be to Allah!"

Babar was flattered "You have not only good civic sense but you also know how to express it. I am pleased with both. Here, take this other bag of gold."

The old Fakir replied "Thank you, Your Majesty, I only knew that a tree when grown-up would yield fruits once a year but this certainly must be a divine tree as it has already yielded twice. Praise be to Allah!"

Babar was so much impressed that he gave one more bag of gold and requested to come to his court the next day as he wanted to introduce him to his courtiers.

The Fakir presented himself in Babar's court. Babar got up from his throne, went up to the Fakir and hugged

him. He explained his encounter the last evening, glorified the Fakir's wit in no uncertain terms and expressed his wish that he would be very happy indeed if the Fakir decided to stay in his court. But Babar was in for a greater shock when Ramakrishna removed the artificial beard and other make-up and told "But Your Majesty, my king has no prejudices against outsiders. He rewards talent irrespective of caste, sex, language or place of the talented person! He does not instruct his courtiers to insult anybody. So, I am sorry I cannot stay here."

Babar and his courtiers felt ashamed of their behaviour towards him. Babar replied "Ramakrishna, please don't think ill of us. We all appreciated your greatness. In fact, when you stopped coming to the court, I decided I had insulted not you but myself and your incomparable knowledge and sense of

humour. You will be pleased to know that I have already sent word about you and suitable gifts to your emperor. Now you have proved most effectively that you have no equal. I hereby declare that you are the wittiest and most knowledgeable man with the keenest sense of humour. And here is my testimonial and gift to you and to your king."

Babar sent him with due respects and honour.

Krishnadevaraya and all other people regarded Ramakrishna on his return with matchless affection and pride.

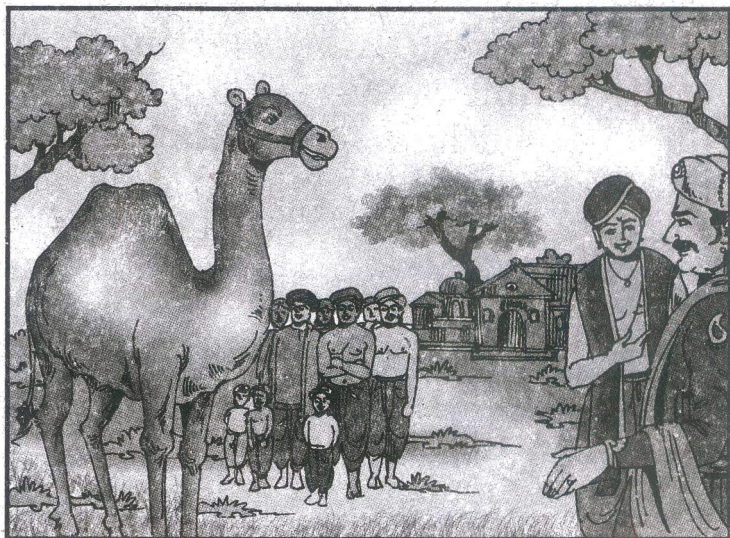
24. WHY A CAMEL HAS A HUMP.



Krishnadevaraya promised a town as a gift to Ramakrishna on his return from Babar's court as a token of his appreciation of what he did there and how he enhanced the honour of Vijayanagar. He promised it in the open court. But due to his multifarious activities and severe problems he forgot to keep up the promise even though he used to see him everyday. Ramakrishna had the experience of the king promising and forgetting not specifically in his case but in general. He wanted this gift especially because he had seen that town and wanted to usher in some reforms there.

But it was a delicate matter to

remind the king. He waited for the right occasion. After many days, the Persian king sent a camel as a present in return for the sandal wood carvings presented by Krishnadevaraya on the former's birth day. For the people of Karnataka and the king, camel was a strange animal. They had never seen it before. The king observed it closely and wondered loudly "How could God create such a tall animal with such an ugly hump on its back?"



Ramakrishna had seen camels during his visit to Delhi and learnt that they are desert animals which store water in their bodies for several days to enable them travel through the desert using the stored water whenever they needed. After explaining his knowledge to the king, he added as if unwillingly "I hesitate to say but I also heard that the kings who forget their promises become camels in their next births." The king looked at Ramakrishna's face at once and saw a mischievous smile. In a minute, he recollected his promise of a town and chuckled. But he wanted to know why Ramakrishna who never aspired for gifts was intent on getting this gift.

Ramakrishna disclosed that the town was backward in spite of having rich resources and he wanted to improve their utilization. The king was happy and arranged for quick grant of the gift.

25. ANYBODY WHO DOESN'T LIE ?



There was a discussion in the court on honesty, truth and lies. Different courtiers expressed different opinions. There seemed to be no end to the discussions. No opinion was unanimous. They all wanted to know why a person lies. "Fear," a few said. "Greed," a few others said. "Selfishness," a few more said. "Sacrifice," yet a few others opined. The king told "Majority of people never tell lies under any circumstances. I have faith in them." Ramakrishna disagreed "Subject to a few exceptions of holy saints, people speak truth only when it serves their purpose. Otherwise, they prefer to speak lies." The king refused to agree "Just because you tell lies, don't

generalize. I am not a holy man, nor are my courtiers. But we never speak lies." The courtiers joined the chorus of the king immediately.

Ramakrishna appeared to be cornered but was bold to contradict him "Even Your Majesty, will speak lies, if the situation warrants." The king could not digest Ramakrishna's statement. It appeared like an accusation. He was supported by many courtiers and threw a challenge "If you can make me speak lies, I will agree to whatever you say in future. And if you fail, you will resign from your ministership."

His distractors were happy believing that at last they could get rid of him without their own efforts. Ramakrishna dug his own grave challenging the king himself. How could he make the king to utter a lie? But Ramakrishna, as usual, took up the challenge and requested for time. The king assured

him generously "Take your own time but remember I will not forget." He was also glad that once he could make Ramakrishna eat a humble pie.

A couple of months passed. The hustle and bustle of court life had made the king and the courtiers forget the discussion and the challenge. Many things happened; many important people visited the court; the people of Vijayanagar witnessed many wonders; and life was going on. But an event happened that caught the attention of the common people, very important people and the courtiers. That was the coming of a saint who claimed that he did penance at the Himalayas for many years and got a boon from the God Himself. He was tall and handsome with a flowing beard and had a holy countenance. He did many miracles in the course of his lectures to prove his assertions. Slowly, people began to believe his powers.

He did not take money from the people which fact added to his popularity. He proclaimed that if people have dedication, he could arrange for Darhan (Vision) of God according to the boon given to him as a result of his penance. There were unprecedented crowds of people who all claimed they wanted to see god. The saint told them that he would make some arrangement so that only those people who are serious could approach him. He selected a big house belonging to a devotee and made some changes in one spacious room. He spent a day and a night in the room with his disciples. People assumed they were purifying the place and doing penance there.

The next morning, he came out looking quite tired and then announced to the people gathered in front of the house "My dear devotees, I have prayed for you all the whole night. But you all

know that not any man or woman whoever just wishes can have the god's darshan. Your status in society does not matter at all before god. You may be a sweeper or a king, a beggar or a Kubera (the demi god of great wealth) but what god wants is total devotion to Him. Therefore, all of you go inside the room one by one and see for yourself the Supreme God. But keep my statement firm in your mind that you will see god if and only if you have not sinned in your life. If you have sinned, you will see only your reflection but if you have been devoted and not sinned, you will see the JYOTHI (divine light) which is the form of God."

After the saint's short but powerful oratory, half the crowd disappeared admitting that they had committed sins. And then one by one, everybody took courage and went inside the room and came out either happy or full of

regrets. This went on for a couple of days. It created such an unshakeable impact and belief across all sections of people that the news reached the courtiers and the king. The saint had created such a noble impression in the people by his austere and ascetic life that he himself had become a model of virtue and piety.

After receiving reports from his informers, the king decided to visit him with the queen and courtiers. Ramakrishna was of course in the group. The saint repeated his statement to the royal entourage. First, the courtiers went inside the special room turn by turn. None of them was willing to admit that he saw his reflection and coolly described the Jyothi. They had heard about it from some of their friends and so were confident in telling the lie as if it was the truth, only the truth and nothing but the truth! Being courtiers

they could not risk stating that they were sinners! Then the king would ask for details of those sins! Then came Ramakrishna's turn. He refused point blank to go inside and did not even bother to give a reason. The king and all others concluded at once that he was a sinner and did not want to make it public.

Then the queen went inside and saw her own reflection. She was horrified! How could she be a sinner? And how could she agree to it in the presence of the king and the courtiers? She came out smiling and told the king it was a really extraordinary sight that she had never seen in her entire life and that she felt she achieved the goal of life. The king went last inside the pooja (worship) room full of confidence. But to his dismay and rude shock, he saw his own reflection very clearly! His reflection shattered him and gave him

tremors. He remembered his queen's description of the sacred jyothi and stayed for some more time but his reflection only changed according to his own movements. The sacred jyothi did not appear. He was crestfallen and was wondering what he should do. He deemed it an insult that his queen could see the jyothi but not he. He made up his mind and came out with a serene face and stated that really the sacred jyothi was the ultimate achievement in his life too!

Ramakrishna took the king to a side and asked the king "Your Majesty, did you see the Jyothi?"

"Why, Yes. You had no courage but as a true devotee, I went inside and had the darshan of god."

"Your Majesty, did you really see the god?"

"Why, Ramakrishna, I really did see."

“Really, Your Majesty saw god in the form of Jyothi!” This time there was some subtle humour in the tone of Ramakrishna. The king could not persist in his lies. He confessed and repented that he was a sinner and saw only his reflection.

Ramakrishna burst out laughing loudly and to the consternation of the king, he called the saint and all the three went inside the special room. The rest of the people thought that there must be some thing super human going on there. To the repentant and concerned king, Ramakrishna gave one more shock! He removed the attachments of the saint and fittings of the special room. After all the disguise of the saint was removed, the king could not believe that the saint was his own courtier who had taken leave of absence on the ground of sickness! He also saw a life-size mirror and some other gadgets which could give rise to instant light in the form of jyothi. Ramakrishna explained that the jyothi was shown to

some people so that they could tell others and spread the news. This would help the liars to speak confidently as if they too had seen the Jyothi. Then he reminded the king about the challenge.

The king hugged Ramakrishna and said "Ramakrishna, today I believe that Kalikamba has really blessed not only you but also me through you. I also appreciate your presence of mind and respect to me for calling me here and telling the entire story in confidence. Let us keep up the outcome of this entire exercise to the public as true. However, I order this show to end now and here. I have accepted your victory and am sure you are happy. I will give you whatever you ask."

"Your Majesty, your love and affection to your people that includes me and my family is all that I want from you. And that is what Kalikamba expects from you." Said Ramakrishna in truthful voice.



EXERCISES

I. ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. Describe Tenali Ramakrishna's meeting with Goddess Kali.
2. How did the King test Tenali Ramakrishna's intelligence?
3. What happened when Subbashastry went to Tenali Ramakrishna's house to bring his horse?
4. What was Thilakaashta Mahisha Bandhana?
5. Why did the greedy Brahmins feel ashamed of themselves?
6. How did Tenali Ramakrishna learn the mother tongue of the linguist who came to Krishnadevaraya's court?
7. Why was Tenali Ramakrishna washing a dog in public?

8. Why did the thieves draw water from Tenali Ramakrishna's well?
9. Why did Tenali Ramakrishna defy the astrologer and ask Krishna devaraya to go ahead with the war?
10. How did Tenali Ramakrishna prove to the king that circumstances decide the status of a person?
11. How did Tenali Ramakrishna trick the great wrestler who challenged the wrestlers of Vijayanagar?
12. Why did Tenali Ramakrishna bow to the donkeys grazing in the field?
13. What happened when the king gifted five elephants to Tenali Ramakrishna?
14. What explanation did Tenali Ramakrishna give for his blank paintings?
15. How did Tenali Ramakrishna teach a lesson to the greedy money lender?
16. How did Tenali Ramakrishna prove

that contentment is a state of mind irrespective of physical possessions?

17. How did Tenali Ramakrishna steal brinjals from the royal garden and still get rewarded?
18. What was the clever trick played by Tenali Ramakrishna to impress Babar?
19. How did Tenali Ramakrishna remind the king of his forgotten promise without mentioning it?
20. How did Tenali Ramakrishna prove that even a king could lie?

II. ACTIVITY:

Enact the various stories of Tenali Ramakrishna on stage.

III. WHO SAID THIS TO WHOM AND WHEN:

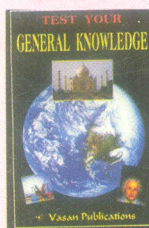
1. "But, then, why did you laugh at me?"
2. "How dare you question my

selection? Get lost and don't show your face to me."

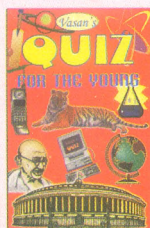
3. "My lord, you are certainly joking, Can a black dog become white by washing it with water?"
4. "Then, why do the Brahmins wear shoes made out of cowhide?"
5. "Then, how come it is fat, in fact, fatter than rest of the cats?"
6. "Oh, gentlemen, enough of water, all the plants are watered. Thank you for helping me."
7. "Never, it is unthinkable; I would fight till my last breath."
8. "Do those donkeys look like saints to you?"
9. "The horse has eaten all the grass, so you cannot see the grass."
10. "Let the house serve the people, I leave it to your discretion."

* * *

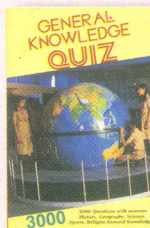
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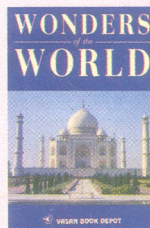
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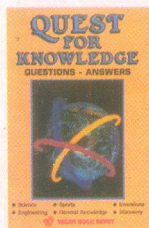
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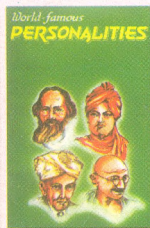
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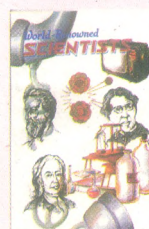
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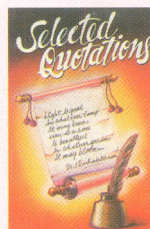
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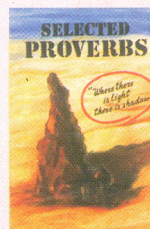
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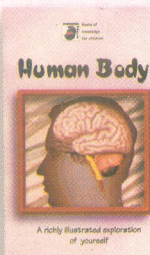
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